XX.—*On the Origin of the Æra Dionysiana, or Æra Vulgaris, or Æra Christiana.* *By* Dr. Gustav Oppert.

Read June 20th, 1872.

The question whether the so-called Æra Dionysiana, or Æra Vulgaris, begins in reality with the year of the birth of Christ, and if not, how many years before or after, has occupied for centuries many theologians, historians, and astronomers.

The incorrectness of the Æra Dionysiana has been acknowledged indeed by scholars, but, beside this negative result, nothing positive has been arrived at. It was at the end of the sixteenth century that the controversy was started anew. About this time was published, at Gratz, in Styria, a book which afterwards became of paramount importance with respect to this question. It was written by a Pole named Laurentius Suslyga, and entitled Velificatio or Theoremata on the year of the birth and death of the Lord.[a] It so happened that when the celebrated Kepler passed through Gratz he became acquainted with it. He was so pleased with the researches of Suslyga that he endeavoured to strengthen them by astronomical observations. The starting point of Kepler was that great conjunction of the three planets Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars which happens once in 800 years. He demonstrated that the star of the Magi mentioned in the Gospel of St. Matthew was identical with this conjunction, and that, in consequence of this fact, the birth of Christ was to be put in the fifth year before the commencement of the Dionysian Æra, in opposition to Suslyga, who had resolved upon the fourth. Dr. Friedrich Münter, the Danish Bishop of Seeland, in his monograph on the star of the Wise Men,[b] adopted the opinion of Kepler, but fixed

[a] Velificatio vel theoremata de anno ortus ac mortis Domini, deque universa Jesu Christi in carne œconomia, quæ ad baccalaureatus in sacra theologia lauream in alma Græcensi academia in disputationem adducit reverendus dominus et eruditus artium liberalium ac philosophiæ magister Laurentius Suslyga, Polonus . . . Græcii . . 1605. 4to. This dissertation is now very scarce.

[b] Der Stern der Weisen. Kopenhagen, 1827.

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the sixth as the right one, instead of the fifth year B.C. The controversy has been reopened since from time to time, but without any final result.

Any one that is not thoroughly acquainted with the nature of these chronological researches will be astonished at their fruitlessness. But when he has more fully considered the subject and remembered that the reports which have come to us from this distant period are not only few and superficial, but also contradictory to each other, he will no longer be surprised to find the controversy as undecided as before. An accurate comparison of the Gospels with profane literature may bring us still nearer to the truth, but the singular state of the documents will prevent probably any exact result which could answer all historical objections and pretensions.

It is a curious fact that, though our common or Christian æra has been used and criticised during more than a thousand years, one point, and in many respects a very essential one, has escaped the notice of nearly all scholars. Kepler excepted, no one, as far as I am aware, has ever tried to find out the reason which induced Dionysius Exiguus to fix the first year of his æra in the way he did. I have attempted in this communication to do this, and to show the principles which guided the Roman abbot in his important and laborious work.

From the earliest days of Christianity it has been found necessary to fix the most remarkable epochs of the life of Christ in order to commemorate and celebrate them with due and pious respect. But the more needful was such an arrangement for the benefit of public worship, the more difficult did it appear to become. If even the Evangelists occasionally seemed to differ from each other, it is not surprising that, in the course of centuries, opinions went often far asunder. This dissension was followed by greater evils, especially when religious and political life became more and more connected with each other. The most dangerous disputes were occasioned by the disagreement with respect to the celebration of Easter. This highest festival, the *festivitas festivitatum*, or the *sollemnitas omnium sollemnitatum*, was not fixed (as Christmas is for instance) to a certain day, but depended on the changing course of the moon. In consideration that the Lord spoke to Moses (Exod. xii. 2): "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months;" and (Deuter. xvi. 1), "Observe the month of Abib (ear), and keep the Passover unto the Lord thy God," it was settled that the days of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, which must fall in the same month, should not depend upon the sun, but upon the movement of the moon. Yet the appointment of the fourteenth day of the moon, that is the day of the

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full moon, still left open ground for dispute—some adopting the astronomical, others the conventional mode of reckoning the moon's age. Instead of celebrating the day of Resurrection on a Sunday, many Christians solemnized the fourteenth of Nisan, as the Jews do. This was the case with the heretical Quartodecimani; others adhered to the course of the sun, and kept for holyday the 25th of March, which was regarded, according to old traditions, as the real date of the Resurrection. (See *Venerabilis Bedæ de temporum ratione liber, cap.* 45: "Galli quacunque die VIII. kal. Apr. fuisset, quando Christi resurrectio fuisse tradebatur, Pascha semper celebrabant.")

That the vernal equinox fell in the Julian calendar on the 25th of March may have supported this tradition, but at any rate the council of Cæsarea in Palestine, which was convoked by the command of Pope Victor (A.D. 193–202), and was held under the presidency of the Bishop of Cæsarea, Theophilus, designated the 25th of March as the day of the Resurrection of Christ. Though the letter of Philip on Easter (*Epistola Philippi de Pascha*), which describes the session of that congregation, is probably spurious, it is nevertheless of old date, being cited by Bede; and, having been regarded by him and his predecessors as a genuine document, it is well worthy of our interest, inasmuch as it shows the manner in which the council was believed to have settled this delicate question. Freely translated into English the letter would run as follows:—

When all the Apostles were gone from this world, the days of fasting were different on the whole earth. All the Gauls kept the Passover on one certain day, the 25th of March (VIII. Kal. Apr.), saying, Why should we celebrate the Pascha, as the Jews do, according to the moon? but, as the birthday of the Lord happens to be always on the same day, the 25th of December (VIII. Kal. Jan.), so we are obliged to celebrate also the Passover on the 25th of March (VIII. Kal. Apr.), when the Resurrection of Christ is declared to have taken place. The orientals, on the contrary, as is related in the history of Eusebius of Cæsarea, kept the Passover on that day of March on which the fourteenth day of the moon happened to be. In Italy some fasted all the forty days, others only thirty days; others said seven days would be sufficient to fast, as the world was created in that time; others consecrated forty hours to the Lord, as he had fasted forty days. When there was such a difference in the observation of the feast, the priests were lamenting that there should be different fasts, where the faith was one. It then seemed proper to Pope Victor, the bishop of the Roman Town, to confer authority on Theophilus of Cæsarea, the bishop of the province of Palestine, Jerusalem at that time not appearing to be the capital, so that the ordination of Easter should proceed from the place where Christ had lived on earth. Theophilus accepted the commission, but, perceiving that the work entrusted to his care was such as would be handed down for the observation of the world, convoked not only all the bishops and wise men of his country, but also of the neighbouring provinces. When this great multitude of priests and wise

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men, who were thoroughly versed in all spiritual writings, were assembled in one place, the bishop Theophilus communicated to them the authority which he had received from Pope Victor, and made them acquainted with the work committed to him. Then all said with one accord: First, we must inquire how the world was made at the beginning; and when this has been diligently investigated, thence may we soundly proceed to the ordering of Easter. Therefore the Bishops said, On what day do we believe the world to have been created? They answered, On the Lord's day (Sunday). Theophilus the Bishop said, How can it be proved that the Lord's day was the first day? And the Bishops answered, The Scripture says, "And it became evening, and it became morning, the first day; then the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh. On that day rested God from all his work, and named it Sabbath." If the Sabbath was therefore the last day, what could be the first day if not the Lord's day? They said, So it is, and not otherwise. The Bishop Theophilus said, Lo, you have proved that the Lord's day was the first day, what do you think of the season? for there are four seasons in the year, spring, summer, autumn, and winter, What season do we believe was the first made in the world? The Bishops answered, The spring time. The Bishop Theophilus said, Prove what you say. And they answered, The Scripture says, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind." This we see done in the spring time. The Bishop Theophilus said, It is true; and he continued, As the spring time is estimated at three months, in which do we believe the beginning of the world to have been, in the first, the middle, or the last? The Bishops said, In the equinox, that is, on the 25th of March (VIII. Kal. Apr.). Theophilus said, Prove what you say. And they answered, The Scripture says, "And God made the light, and called the light day, and God made the darkness, and the darkness He called night. And God divided equally between the light and the darkness." Theophilus said, It is the spring time, lo, you have proved the day and the time; what do you think of the moon? Do we say that it was created full or decreasing? The Bishops said, Full. But he said, Prove what you say. The Bishops answered, The Scripture says, "And God made two great lights and set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night." The moon which gave light upon the earth during the whole night could only be the full moon. Theophilus said, It is truly so. Now, then, let us find how the world was created. They answered, On the Lord's day, in the spring time, at the equinox, that is, on the 25th of March (VIII. Kal. Apr.), at full moon. The Bishops said, Just as in the beginning the world was created, so at the same time was it also redeemed from sin by the resurrection of our Lord. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ took therefore place on the Lord's day, in the spring time, at the equinox, at full moon. At the same time arise the elements. Theophilus said, Lo, we have investigated how in the beginning the world was made and how redeemed from sin. Now we must proceed to the observation of the Passover, and see on what day, at what time, at what moon the Passover is to be kept. What do you think of the Lord's day? The Bishops said, How can we overlook the Lord's day that the Passover should not be kept on it, that day which is sanctified by so many and so great benedictions? The Bishop Theophilus said, State more precisely what and how great are these benedictions, that we may know what are the sanctifications you ascribe to it, and may write them down. The Bishops

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said, The first benediction is, that the darkness was removed on the Lord's day, and the light appeared. The second, that the people of Israel were delivered from hard bondage, out of the Egyptian darkness by the Red Sea, as by the fountain of baptism. The third, because Moses called for the people of Israel and said, Observe the first day and the last day, that is the Lord's day and the Sabbath. The fourth, because the whole 117th (118th) psalm celebrates the Passion and Resurrection. The Passion, saying, "They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns;" and after some verses, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." This of the Passion. Of the Resurrection he says, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it;" and after some verses, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." They said, it is right to celebrate the Passover on the Lord's day, being sanctified by so great benedictions, since on it also our Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead. Theophilus said, Lo it is stated of the Lord's day. But what do you think of the time? They answered, Can that be otherwise understood which is predicted in the Holy Scriptures, when Moses says, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months. Keep the Passover in it." He does not say on the first day of the month, or on the tenth, or on the twentieth, but he sanctified all the thirty days to the Passover. Theophilus said, Which are these thirty days? And they answered, We have said already that the beginning of the world was at the equinox. From the 25th of March (VIII. Kal. Apr.) to the 24th of April (VIII. Kal. Maii) are the thirty days sanctified to the Passover. The Bishop Theophilus said, Is it not impious to exclude those three days of the passion of the Lord from the term, viz., the 22nd of March (XI. Kal. Apr.), the fifth day of the week, which is called the Lord's Supper, on which He sat down with His Disciples, when He also foretold to Judas that he would betray Him? Which is known to have been fulfilled. For the Lord suffered from the 22nd of March (XI. Kal. Apr.), in which night He was betrayed by Judas, and arose on the 25th of March (VIII. Kal. Apr.) from the dead. How can therefore these days be excluded from the term? All then said, It was not right to exclude the Passion from the term, but that these three days should be introduced into the Easter order, and three days deducted from the end. And so it was resolved in that council that the Passover should be neither before the 22nd of March (XI. Kal. Apr.), nor after the 21st of April (XI. Kal. Maii). Theophilus said, Lo, the day and time is fixed, what do you think of the moon? They answered, The divine prescript may be likewise observed with respect to the moon, as Moses says, "And you shall observe it from the fourteenth to the twenty-first day of the moon." It is consecrated that these eight days of the moon were in the Pascha. When therefore within this fixed term a Lord's Day (Sunday) and one of these eight days of the moon occurs, we are obliged to celebrate the Pascha. (See Labbe and Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio. Florence, 1759, vol. I. p. 713—716).

These debates, as represented in the letter of Philip, denote the belief of that period. Neither ecclesiastics nor laymen cared for scientific studies or historical criticisms.

Although the majority of the fathers regarded the 25th of March as the genuine

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date of the resurrection of Christ, there were also many who asserted that it was the day of the Passion. We find this opinion defended by Tertullian, when he says that the Passion was fulfilled under the Emperor Tiberius, during the consulate of Rubellius Geminus and Rufius Geminus, in the month of March, at Easter, on the 25th of March (VIII. Kal. Apr.), the first day of the unleavened bread.[a]

Augustine agrees on two points with Tertullian, where he states that Christ died under the consulate of the Gemini on the 25th of March, on the very day when He is believed to have been conceived,[b] but on another he contradicts himself, saying, "On the same day, that our Saviour was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, He arose from the infernal regions with the glory of the Passion."[c]

Clement of Alexandria affirms, "Some fix the Passion of Christ in the 16th year of Tiberius, on the 25th of Phamenoth, others on the 25th of Pharmuthi, others say that the Saviour suffered on the 19th of Pharmuthi."[d]

This sentence, which until now has not been satisfactorily interpreted, is most likely to be explained thus, that the two first dates refer to the Easter terms, and the last to a particular date, the former pretty nearly coinciding with the Easter terms, as fixed in the Council of Cæsarea, for the 25th of Phamenoth corresponds with the XII. Kal. Apr. or the 21st of March, and the 25th of Pharmuthi with the XII. Kal. Maii or the 20th of April; and the 19th of Pharmuthi would then be the 14th of April, which could be applied to the 29th year after Christ, when Easter Sunday fell on the 17th of April.[e] This conjecture is supported by Clement himself in another passage, when he alludes to the 15th year of Tiberius as the real year of the Passion.[f]

The well-known German scholar Ideler tried lately to prove that the old

[a] See Adv. Judæos 8: Quæ passio hujus exterminii intra tempora LXX. hebdomadarum perfecta est sub Tiberio Cæsare, coss. Rubellio Gemino et Rufio Gemino, mense Martio, temporibus Paschæ, die VIII. kalendarum Aprilium, die prima azymorum, quo agnum ut occiderent ad vesperum a Moyse fuerat præceptum.

[b] Augustinus de civ. dei XVIII. 54: Mortuus est ergo Christus duobus Geminis consulibus, octavo kal. Aprilis; and, De trinitate IV. 5: Octavo kal. Aprilis conceptus creditur Christus quo et passus.

[c] De tempore, p. 22 (see Suslyga, p. 40 *b*): Qua die conceptus est in utero virginis, in ipsa resurrexit ab inferis cum gloria passionis.

[d] Strom. lib. 1, cap. 21: *Τό τε πάθος αὐτοῦ ἀκριβολογούμενοι φέρουσιν οἱ μέν τινες τῷ ἐκκαιδεκάτῳ ἔτει Τιβερίου Καίσαρος, φαμενὼθ κέ, οἱ δὲ φαρμουθὶ κέ· ἄλλοι δὲ φαρμουθὶ ιθ' πεπονθέναι τὸν Σωτῆρα λέγουσιν.*

[e] Considering the passion to commence on Thursday evening.

[f] Lib. 1, cap. 21, 145: *Πεντεκαιδεκάτῳ οὖν ἔτει Τιβερίου καὶ πεντεκαιδεκάτῳ Αὐγούστου, οὕτω πληροῦνται τὰ τριάκοντα ἔτη ἕως οὗ ἔπαθεν.*

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Jewish festival of the unleavened bread could not be kept in Palestine at the end of March. "Nowadays" he says, in his *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie*, vol. ii. p. 420 (Berlin 1826), "the Jews, living dispersed and fixing the Passover according to a cycle, celebrate it not seldom in the last days of March; but at the time of Christ, when they were still living in their native country, and they presented their omer on the 16th of Nisan, the Pascha could not fall simultaneously with the spring equinox. For all the travellers maintain that the barley does not ripen in Palestine earlier than a fortnight after that period. The 25th of March is therefore no historical date. It can be easily explained why the first Christians fixed the death of the Saviour on that same day which Cæsar had declared to be the spring equinox, as it was for them the day of his incarnation, and also of the creation of the world." Ideler may be right in his arguments with respect to the ripening of the barley, but he seems to be wrong when he contends that the day of the incarnation of Christ could be regarded as the same as that of the creation of the world and of the Passion. Those who mourned on the 25th of March for the crucified Saviour commemorated that date as the creation of Adam, which had taken place on the sixth day of the week, for as death and sin came into the world with the first man, so were the terrors of death and the power of hell abolished on the same date by the passion of Christ. But whoever celebrated the 25th of March as the day of the creation of the world considered that date as that of the Resurrection, for the creation, as well as the Resurrection, took place on the first day of the week, the *dies dominicus*. It was the peculiarity of those times to connect historical facts with unhistorical dates. The same spirit appears in the works of the Aquitanian Victorius, who, to prove his assertion that Christ arose from the dead on the 28th of March, affirmed that the Resurrection could only come to pass on the same day on which the sun, the moon, and the stars were created in the beginning; and, this creation having taken place on the fourth day, the fourth day after the 25th of March—the date of the creation of the world, that is, the 28th of March—must be the right one.

For our purpose it does not matter whether the tradition which fixed the Resurrection on the 25th of March was right or wrong, or whether the 27th or 28th of the same month correspond more nearly with historical truth; it suffices to have proved that unhistorical dates may acquire historical importance in becoming the starting points of later Christian æras.

Before entering further into the discussion, it may be expedient to mention the most important of the Easter canons. The Gaul Hippolytus, and the Alexandrians

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Dionysius and Anatolius, who lived about the middle of the third century, are said to have made the first Easter canons. The calculations of Hippolytus, a pupil of Irenæus, embraced a period of 112 (7 × 16) years. This is mentioned by Cyril and Victorius. The former was right in doubting its accuracy. The Bishop of Alexandria, Dionysius, is said to have been the author of an Easter canon available for eight years, while to the learned Anatolius, Bishop of Laodicea, is ascribed the first Easter cycle of 19 years. We do not know much more about this cycle, it is even uncertain if it was ever applied to fix the festival of Easter, though it was afterwards adopted when modified by the Alexandrians, and then nearly throughout Christendom. Before accepting the canon of 19 years, the Latin Church used the cycle of 84 years. The Easter calculations of the Alexandrians, whose astronomical knowledge was highly esteemed, were fixed in the first year of the Emperor Diocletian (284 after Christ). By order of Theodosius the Great, Theophilus of Alexandria formed an Easter table extending over 418 years. This was afterwards abbreviated by Cyril into one of 95 years, which, divided into five divisions of 19 years each, embraced the period of 153—247 post Diocletian, or 437—531 after Christ.

These cycles and canons, being only made for the regulation of Easter, had no concern with the establishment of a general æra. It is only to the time of Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, that a combination of both can be traced back. At that time Anianus and Panodorus published their works on Chronology. These learned Alexandrian monks, though using the same æra, differed in essential points. Anianus, the elder of them, put the birth of Christ in the 5501st, Panodorus in the 5493rd year of their æra. This statement is evidence enough to prove that Anianus is the real author of the æra, and that Panodorus only tried to rectify it, for if it were not so he would not have called his first year of Christ 5493 but 5501. Anianus believed that from the creation of Adam to the 22nd year of the reign of Constantine the Great 5816 years had elapsed. This 22nd year of Constantine being specified as having the 14th of the moon (luna XIV.) on the 29th of Phamenoth or the 25th of March, and Easter Sunday on the 3rd of Pharmuthi or the 29th of March, turns out to be the 324th year of the Christian æra. The Egyptian year beginning with the first of Thoth, our 29th or 30th of August, it is evident that Anianus puts the birth of Christ eight years later than Dionysius, $5816 - 5500 = 316$, $324 - 316 = 8$. Anianus was of opinion that the combination of the cycles of the sun and the moon would afford the most accurate period of measuring the time; and by reasoning in this manner, he adopted the great period of 532 years, as the cycle of the sun consisted of 28

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years, and that of the moon of 19 years—$28 \times 19 = 532$. It was believed for a long time, that this period was the only true one, and that after 532 years, the sun and the moon stood in exactly the same place, and all the phases of these two celestial bodies were quite the same as 532 years before. This period was used by Anianus to divide the years of the world, and the 5816th year of his æra is therefore the 496th year of his eleventh period.

Anianus, believing that Christ arose from the dead on the 25th of March and had lived 33 years, put his birth in the beginning of the 5501st year of the world. In the 42nd year of our common æra Easter Sunday fell on the 25th of March, and on the 17th day of the moon, according to the Easter calculations then in use. This year was, from Anianus' point of view, the real year of the Passion and Resurrection, and from the reasons above-mentioned he called it the 5534th of the world. Although this year corresponds to our A.D. 42, and is the 2nd of the Emperor Claudius, Anianus called it the 18th of Tiberius. Notwithstanding this great mistake, the æra of Anianus was almost universally adopted by the Oriental Christians, and is still now used by the Christians of Ethiopia, who, adhering at the same time to the period of Diocletian, fix its commencement in the 5776th instead of the 5784th year of their æra, or in the 276th instead of the 284th year after Christ. In the chronicles of the Byzantines, Maximus, Syncellus, Theophanes, and others, the same error, the origin of which is now explained, will be found.

A younger countryman of Anianus, whose name was Panodorus, detected the error committed by the former, and trying to correct it fixed the birth of Christ eight years earlier than Anianus had done, that is in the 5493rd year of their æra. Syncellus reports in his Chronographia, p. 35, that Panodorus took the 24th of Phamenoth (about the 20th of March) 5525 or 5526 for the date of the Passion, but in neither of these years was Good Friday on the 20th of March, for in the former Good Friday was on the 3rd of April, and in the latter on the 26th of March. It is much more probable that Panodorus was, with Anianus, an adherent of the 25th of March as the day of the Resurrection, and assumed, with the fathers Tertullian, Clement, Lactantius, and others, that Christ lived on the earth for thirty years, that is from 5493 to 5523, which corresponds with A.D. 31. It must not be forgotten though that the Egyptian year began at the end of August, and that a year of this kind cannot correspond with a year of our common æra. Eusebius took the same year as Panodorus for the year of the Passion, but, believing that from the Conception to the Resurrection *thirty-three years had elapsed*, declared the 5200th year of his æra to have

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been the year of the birth, and the 5232nd that of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ.[a]

Half a century after Anianus the famous Aquitanian, Victorius of Limoges, received the honourable commission from the Archdeacon Hilary (who some years later became Pope, A.D. 461-468) to inquire into the causes of the errors found in the Easter cycles, to correct them, and to form if possible a new canon. Victorius justified the confidence placed in him, and presented to Hilary in 457 a new Easter cycle, which he accompanied with a prologue. In this prologue he criticised the canons hitherto used, *e.g.* the Latin cycle of 84 years, the canon of Cyril of 95 years, being an abreviation of the canon of Theophilus, and that of Hippolytus, consisting of 113 years. He resolved finally upon the great period of 532 years, which he adopted from his predecessors, but which, notwithstanding, received from him the name of the Victorian period. He states that he was much indebted to the works of Eusebius Pamphili, of the presbyter Hieronymus, and of Prosper, but he does not mention the names of those who first used the period of 532 years, viz., Anianus and Panodorus.

Imitating the example of his predecessors, Victorius also made the day of the Resurrection his starting point; yet, differing from Anianus, he did not choose the 25th, but the 28th of March. His reasoning was rather curious. Though, faithful to the tradition, he declared the 25th of March to be the first day of the world, he rejected this date as the day of the Resurrection. For according to his opinion Christ could arise on no other day but that on which the firmament of heaven had first been brightened by the splendour of the sun, the moon, and the stars. The creation of the celestial lights was the event of the fourth day, and accordingly the Resurrection happened on the 28th of March, the fourth day of the world from the 25th. In A.D. 28 Easter Sunday fell on the 28th of March. This year was declared by Victorius to have been the year of the Passion and Resurrection, as well as of the consulate of the Gemini, though the two Gemini were consuls in A.D. 29. The 28th year of the Dionysian æra became thus the first of that of Victorius, for he did not begin with the year of the Birth, but with the year of the Resurrection of Christ. This fact is a very important support of the following arguments. Beginning with A.D. 28, Victorius marked the Passover for 532 years, ascribing to 430 years, till A.D. 457, the names of the consuls, though the *fasti* are for the first three centuries till A.D. 347 not trustworthy, and

[a] See Thesaurus Temporum Eusebii Pamphili Cæsareæ Palestinæ Episcopi. Chronicorum Canonum omnimodæ historiæ libri duo, interprete Hieronymo. Latin and Greek.

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omitting them for 102 years; Victorius adopted also the Eusebian æra of the world.[a]

So much of the Easter canon of Victorius. It is probable that Hilary adopted it, as there was a convenient opportunity for doing so, in A.D. 465, when the Latin cycle of 84 years ended. But the quarrel in respect of the celebration of Easter was as yet not brought to a final conclusion, for the tables of Victorius did not remove every topic of dissension, and in the years 475, 495, 496, 499, and 526 the Passover was celebrated a week later in the west than in the east. To remove such anomalies for the future was the intention of Dionysius Exiguus, when he added ninety-five years, or five cycles each of nineteen years, to the before-mentioned cycles of Cyril, whose time was nearly accomplished. The Easter calculations of Dionysius were the more important, being connected with a new æra destined to be adopted almost throughout the world. But, though the æra of the learned Scythian monk is known and adopted in all quarters of the globe, we know nearly nothing of its author. Cassiodorus gives a very amiable portrait of his friend in the 23rd chapter of his work, De Institutione divinarum literarum. Dionysius, with the nickname "the short," or *exiguus*, was a Scythian by birth, but a Roman by habits. Well versed in the classical languages, he was generally esteemed on account of his great erudition and beloved for his modesty. He seems to have been possessed of a mild temper, and instead of being a zealot was even accused of belonging to the heretical sect of the Theopaschites, which insinuation is refuted with the utmost disdain by his friend and acquaintance Cassiodorus. Excepting these few statements, no reports have come to us respecting his life, we are even ignorant of the time of his birth and death. The accounts referring to the latter event vary from A.D. 540 to 560.

The first mention of the Dionysian æra may be traced back to the year 525. In a letter addressed to the bishop Petronius, Dionysius comments upon the errors found in the different Easter cycles hitherto used, and explains the principles which guided him while continuing the cycles of Cyril. To this letter or report is joined a Latin translation from the Greek letter of the Alexandrian bishop Proterius to Pope Leo. In the following year (A.D. 526) Dionysius defended himself against the calumnies spread by the adherents of Victorius. This defence is contained in a letter to Boniface. His epistle to Petronius informs

[a] See the Prologus of Victorius in Ægidii Bucherii Atrebatis e societate Jesu in Victorii Aquitani canonem paschalem scriptum anno Christi vulgari CCCCLVII. et nunc primum in lucem editum Commentarius. Antwerp, 1633, p. 7, *seqq.*

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us of his reasons for continuing the cycles of Cyril and for abolishing the æra of Diocletian.

St. Cyril began, as Dionysius says, his first cycle of nineteen years with the 153rd year of Diocletian and ended his last or fifth cycle with the 247th year of the same æra. He adds, "But I, not wishing to perpetuate the memory of this impious persecutor, instead of beginning my cycle with the 248th year of one who was a tyrant rather than an emperor, have preferred to number the years from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order that the commencement of our hope may become better known to us, and the cause of the human reparation, that is the Passion of our Saviour, may appear more evidently."

The last year of the Cyrillian canon was—

Annus Diocl. CCXXXXVII. *Indictio* VIII. *Epactæ* XVIII. *Concurrentes* II. *Circulus lunæ* XVI. *Luna* XIV. *Paschalis* XV. *Kal. Mai. Dies dominicus* XII. *Kal. Mai. Luna diei dominici* XVII. Immediately to this year Dionysius added the first of his cycle, which instead of calling it the 248th of Diocletian, he named:

Annus Domini DXXXII. *Indictio* X. *Epacta nulla, Concurrentes* IV. *Circulus lunæ* XVII. *Luna* XIV. *Paschalis Non. Apr. Dies dominicus* III. *Id. Apr. Luna diei dominici* XX.

As Dionysius does not intimate in the works which we possess how he contrived to fix the first year of his æra, nor mentions how he numbered the years, but only confesses himself an adherent of the period of 532 years, he leaves a good field to conjecture. Now, if we remember how the predecessors of Dionysius, Anianus, Panodorus, Eusebius, Victorius, and others invented their æras, adopting as their starting point a self-chosen date for the Resurrection, and either beginning immediately an æra from the Passion, as Victorius did, or going back according to their individual opinion, thirty to thirty-three years, and commencing an æra from the conception or birth of Christ; it is extremely probable that Dionysius acted in the same manner. According to my opinion Dionysius was an adherent of the 25th of March as the date of Resurrection; he believed besides that about 500 years before his time Christ had suffered, and was risen from the dead, after having wandered on earth thirty years. Following Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Julius Africanus,[a] he had moreover adopted the period of 532 years. In continuing the Cyrillian cycles he met with a year on which Easter Sunday fell on the 25th March. This year he called therefore

[a] The æra of Julius Africanus is founded on historical principles, starting, as is very likely, from the 16th year of Tiberius, and arriving so at his 5550th year. He lived (221 p. Chr.) before Easter cycles were in use.

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the 563rd after Christ 532 + 31, that is the 532nd year after the Resurrection, which occurred in the 31st year of Jesus. By a singular chance Dionysius was prevented from taking an earlier year, for during 73 years, that is from 490 to 563 after Christ no Easter Sunday fell on the 25th March. In adopting the first 25th of March on which Easter Sunday was celebrated he escaped an error committed by Anianus, who selected in his cycles the next one, and called that year, which is the 42nd after Christ and the 2nd of Claudius, the 5534th (34th) of his æra and the 18th of Tiberius. In A.D. 53 and A.D. 585 Easter Sunday was again on the 25th of March, but was not used for an æra. From A.D. 53 and 585 no Easter Sunday coincided with the 25th of March until A.D. 126 and 658, which was evidently too late a term to be used as a date for fixing an æra. The 31st year of Dionysius is moreover synchronous with the 5232nd of Eusebius, and the 1st year of Dionysius with the 5493rd of Panodorus, so that Dionysius has in common with Eusebius the year of the Resurrection and with Panodorus the year of the birth of Christ.

A most striking difference between the work of Dionysius and those of his predecessors appears in the fact that, while Dionysius's object was merely to continue and reform the Easter cycle, the latter tried to combine their Easter calculations with chronological statements, and were for that reason exposed to the commission of historical blunders, as may be proved by many examples.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle supports in a striking manner the opinion above mentioned respecting the fixing of the first year of the Dionysian æra. In a note to the year 625 is to be read, "This is the cycle of Dionysius; it consists of five series of 19 years, that is of 95 years, and it takes its beginning from the 30th year of our Lord's incarnation and finishes in the 626th year."[a] From this quotation it is evident that Dionysius did not begin his calculations with the first year of his æra, but with a later one described as the 30th year of our Lord's incarnation; this would be the 31st of his æra, when Easter Sunday fell on the 25th of March. If the tradition in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is true (and we have no reason to doubt its genuineness) Dionysius regarded the first year, which in his cycles had Easter Sunday on the 25th of March, as the year corresponding, according to the adopted period of 532 years, with the real year of the Resurrection of Christ;

[a] Hic cyclus Dionysii quinque decennovenalibus constans, hoc est XCV. annis: sumitque exordium a XXX. anno Incarnationis Domini et desinit in DCXXVI. anno. [This passage occurs only among the Latin additions to the Chronicle in the Bodleian MS. Laud. 636. As it stands it is not intelligible. It has been suggested by Mr. R. C. Nichols, F.S.A., that the numeral D has been accidentally inserted, and that the note belongs to the year CXXVI., as 31 + 95 = 126. *Ed.*]

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limiting His life to 30 years, he called that year the 31st added to 532, 31 + 532 or the 563rd year after Christ, and fixed in this way his æra. The testimony of the chronicle is the more important, considering that the introduction of the Dionysian æra is in a great part the result of the work of the greatest scholar of his time, the Anglo-Saxon Venerable Bede, who exactly at that time wrote his renowned books on the Easter festival. Dionysius abstained, as far as we know, from strengthening, or rather weakening, the correctness of his æra by introducing into it historical facts, knowing most likely how difficult it is to avoid blunders and how easy to commit errors.

Adopting this view, the opinion much in vogue that Dionysius declared the 753-4 year of Rome as the birthyear of Christ must be considered false. In the chronicle of Eusebius, which contains so many different æras (for instance those of the Roman Emperors, the Jewish kings, the Olympiads, the Hebrew years of Jubilee), the æra from the founding of Rome (*æra ab urbe condita*) is not even mentioned. The Venerable Bede, to whom we owe a more correct knowledge of the Dionysian cycles, though mentioning the Roman æra, does not give the year 754, but the year 752 of Rome, as the year of Christ's birth.

It is a question still undecided in which year of his first cycle Dionysius put the birth of Christ, whether in the first or in the second. According to the remark found in the Anglo-Saxon chronicle that the Dionysian Æra takes its beginning from the 30th year of our Lord's incarnation, we are justified in assuming that the first year of the Dionysian Æra, that is, the second of his cycle, is meant to be the year of Christ's birth. Ideler (vol. ii. p. 383) is of the same opinion, but supports it by stating that the custom of the ancient chroniclers was rather to antedate than to postdate. At all events, the year of the Passion and Resurrection remains the same. We should not have dwelt on this topic had it not been of some importance in later times. It is scarcely necessary to remark that the commencement of the year was not always fixed, as it is now, on the 1st of January, but on other days, especially on the 25th of March. But it is important to note that, according to difference in opinion, different calculations were used at the same time. A most striking example is offered by the two neighbouring towns, Florence and Pisa, which till 1749 had two different æras, the so-called *Calculus Florentinus* and the *Calculus Pisanus*. They differed in a whole year, Pisa fixing the conception of Christ in the first year of the first cycle and Florence in the first year of the æra, so that 1749 in Pisa corresponded to 1748 in Florence. The first day of the year was in both towns the 25th of March. Others began the year on the 25th of December, the 1st or 6th of

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January, or with Easter; the Egyptians, as we have seen, on the 1st of Thoth, the 29-30 of August. From this it is manifest that, in order to rectify old dates, we must consider not only the custom of those times, but also the custom in use in the respective places.

With regard to Dionysius, it is pretty clear that he did not begin the year with the 25th of March, for in doing so he would have been obliged to note two Passovers in one year, for instance, in 4 (536), 15 (547), &c.

The only writer known to me who, as I have previously mentioned, tried to explain the reasons which induced Dionysius to fix his æra is Kepler. In his dissertation on the year of Christ's birth[a] he maintains that Dionysius followed the assertion of Chrysostome, according to which John the Baptist was conceived on the 27th of September or the 10th of Tishri; and since, as in Julius 45 the 27th of September corresponded with the 10th of Tishri, Dionysius adopted Julius 46 as the year of Christ's birth. Now, though Kepler may be right in his assertion respecting the coincidence of the two dates in Julius 45, his hypothesis is not only very doubtful but highly improbable. For, apart from the manner in which the other chroniclers, as we have seen, fixed their æras, it may be easily shown that if the 27th of September fell on the same day with the 10th of Tishri in Julius 45 Dionysius was not likely to know it. He believed in the accuracy of the great period of 532 years, not knowing that the Julian years of which this period was composed gained each year $11\frac{1}{2}$ minutes, which difference amounts in 532 Julian years nearly to 4 days and 6 hours, and what was in the Julian year 45 the 27th of September would have been the 23rd in the lifetime of Dionysius. It was only 30 years before Kepler published his dissertation that the reformed Gregorian kalendar had been introduced.

It may perhaps be necessary to meet beforehand an objection which could be made against our conclusions. The 25th of March in A.D. 31 is not the 17th day of the moon, but is recorded as its 15th day. Now, this circumstance would be puzzling if Bede, who is generally very accurate, had not been similiarly inexact in the year 34, when Easter Sunday is said to have been on the 27th of March and the 21st day of the moon. The only scholar who paid attention to this point is Anianus, who chose for this reason the year 42 after Christ as the year of the Resurrection. In this essay mention has been so often made of the inaccuracy of the old chroniclers that it is only fair to prove this assertion. For this reason a short abstract from Bede's work on the six ages of the world (De sex ætatibus mundi) may be given in translation. Bede is undoubtedly an author of great erudition, but it would be better if his works were read more and less praised.

[a] The German edition was published in Strasburg, 1613, the Latin in Frankfurt, 1614.

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In the year of the world 3910 Cæsar, after having reigned 5 years and 6 months, was killed in the Senate by sixty or more Roman senators and knights on account of the insolence of his manners.

3910—3966. Octavianus Cæsar (Augustus), second king (Augustus) of the Romans, reigned 56 years and 6 months; after him the Roman kings were named Augusti; 15 years he reigned in the lifetime of Cleopatra and 41 after her. In the 11th year of Augustus, when the pontificate of Judæa was not occupied, Herod, who, as the son of Antipater Ascalonita and of Cypris, an Arabian woman, had no claims to it, received from the Romans the kingdom of the Jews, and kept it for 36 years. . . . He married Mariamne, the daughter of Alexander, the niece of Aristobulus, the brother of Hyrcanus, who had been before him king of the Jews. She bore him five sons, of whom he killed two, Alexander and Aristobulus, in Samaria, and soon afterwards he despatched in a similar manner also their mother, of whom he had been once fonder than of anybody else.

The sixth age. In the year of the world 3952, the 42nd of Cæsar Augustus, the 27th from the death of Cleopatra and Antonius, the 3rd year of the 194th Olympiad, the 752nd of Rome, in that year, when, by the command of God, Cæsar, after suppressing the troubles of all the nations of the whole earth, had made the strongest and truest peace, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, consecrated the sixth age of the world by His arrival. In the 47th year of Augustus, Herod died a most miserable but just death from dropsy, his body being filled with worms. Instead of him his son Archelaus was appointed by Augustus, and reigned 9 years, until the end of the same Augustus. He was then relegated to Vienne, a town in Gaul, and his four brothers, Herod, Antipater, Lysias, and Philip were created tetrarchs in his place.

In the year of the world 3966, Tiberius, the stepson of Augustus, the son of his wife Livia from a previous marriage, reigned 23 years. In the 12th year of his reign he appointed Pilate procurator of Judæa. The tetrarch Herod, who ruled 24 years over the Jews, founded Tiberias and Libias, in honour of Tiberius and his mother Livia.

In the year of the world 3981, in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius, the Lord, after the baptism which John preached, announced to the world the reign of heaven.

In the year of the world 3984, in the 18th year of the reign of Tiberius, the Lord redeemed the world by His Passion, and the Apostles who were to preach in the regions of Judæa ordain James, the brother of the Lord, Bishop of Jerusalem.

A slight examination shows the inaccuracy of these statements. Bede begins the reign of Augustus with the death of Cæsar, and assigns to him 56 years six months, while the least should have been 57. Augustus is said to have reigned 15 years, while Cleopatra was alive, and 41 after her death, whereas he reigned 43 after the battle of Actium. The reign of Herod is fixed between the 11th and the 47th years of Augustus, but the first year of Herod should have been the 4th, or 3914 (instead of 3921), and the last the 40th year of Augustus, or 3950 (instead of 3957). Queen Mariamne is said to have survived the execution of her children, Alexander and Aristobulus, whereas Mariamne was executed 23 years before the death of her sons.

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Bede describes the 3984th year of his æra as the year of the Resurrection, which would be the 18th of Tiberius, and the 32nd of Dionysius, but in the 45th chapter of his *Liber de temporum ratione*, he seems to prefer the 34th of Dionysius, which would be the 20th of Tiberius.

Though Bede is in general a staunch adherent of the 27th of March as the day of the Resurrection, he approves also the 25th of March, for in 3984 Easter Sunday fell on this date, and in the same work he says, chapter 65, "whence there is some reason to believe that our Lord was crucified on the 23rd of March (unde merito creditur . . . . . eodem decimo kal. April. die Dominum fuisse crucifixum).

In the 45th chapter Bede goes on commenting: "In 532 years, as we have mentioned previously, the Easter cycle is fulfilled; to these (532) add 33 or rather 34, and you will receive the year when the Lord suffered, which is the 566th. This is therefore the year of the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord, for as the 533rd year corresponds with the first, so corresponds also the 566th with the 34th in all the conjunctions of the sun and moon. If you open now the cycles of Dionysius, and find in the 566th year of the incarnation of our Lord the 14th day of the moon occurring on the 24th day of March, on the fifth week-day, and Easter Sunday on the 27th of March, on the 17th day of the moon, be thankful to the Lord, for what was sought for he gave to you, as he had promised."

This statement of Bede is an important evidence in favour of our hypothesis, for in the same way as we suggested that Dionysius may have found the 536th year of his æra Bede found the 566th. But if we now examine the cycles of Dionysius to assure us of the accuracy of the statements of Bede respecting the year 566, we shall be astonished to find that neither the 14th day of the moon fell in that year on the 24th of March, nor the 17th on Easter Sunday, but the former on the 21st and Easter Sunday on the 28th of March. If the conditions required by Bede should be satisfied, he ought to prefer the 12th year after Christ to the 34th, for in the 12th Easter Sunday was really on the 27th of March, being the 17th day of the moon, and he does so in the 59th chapter of his *Liber de temporum ratione.* In this belief he did not stand alone, for we read in the Appendix to the Chronicle of Florence of Worcester, "In the year of the Incarnation of the Lord according to the Gospel 701, according to Dionysius, in whose error the holy Church still participates, 679."[a]

[a] Anno ab incarnatione domini secundum evangelium DCCI., juxta Dionysium, cujus errorem adhuc sancta sequitur ecclesia, anno DCLXXIX.

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The first year of this æra would be 22 before Christ, for this chronicler, as well as Bede and the Roman Church, fixed 33 years as the lifetime of Christ. The Roman Church dated generally from the Resurrection year, as Bede affirms.[b]

The pertinacity with which Bede adheres to the 17th day of the moon as the only right day of the Resurrection is wonderful. He maintains that whosoever should adopt the 25th of March as the real Resurrection day must take the fifth year of the third cycle, *i.e.* 42 after Christ, as Anianus did; whosoever should prefer the 27th of March was to choose the 13th year of the first cycle, or 12 after Christ; and whosoever was an adherent of the 28th of March could not keep from the 2nd year of the cycle. This, as no other occurs agreeing with this stipulation, can only be the 11th cycle, or 191 after Christ. From 57 before Christ to 191 after Christ no year possesses the peculiarity required by Bede.[c]

It is rather singular that the theory of Bede is not confirmed by his praxis, for neither the year 34 nor 566 satisfy his demand, and while declaring the 34th year after Christ as the real year of the Passion, he is fain to resolve upon the 12th year of the Dionysian æra.

In summing up the results of this dissertation, we find that Dionysius declared, as all the authors of Easter cycles had done before him, a certain date as the day of the Resurrection. Of this date, the 25th of March, he made use for finding his æra. Believing that, about 500 years before his time, Christ had lived for 30 years on earth, and being an adherent of the great period of 532 years, he named the first year, in which in his continuation of the Cyrillian cycle Easter Sunday fell on the 25th of March, 563 after Christ, that is 532+31, and, doing so, found the first year of his æra.

[b] Sancta siquidem Romana et apostolica ecclesia . . . numerum annorum triginta semper et tribus annis minorem quam ab ejus incarnatione Dionysius ponat, adnotat. De temporum ratione, c. 45.

[c] De temporum ratione, cap. 59: Ubi autem primum dominicus resurrectionis Christi dies fuerit, varie refertur; et quidem, ut supra memoravimus, quidem VIII. Calendarum Aprilium, sed alii VI. nonnulli v. Calendarum earundem die fuisse adseverant. Ubi notandum, quia si octava Calendarum memoratarum, ut antiquiores scripsere, resurrectio Domini facta est, quintus profecto circuli decennovenalis tunc agebatur annus, habens concurrentes VII. et lunam decimamquartam, sicut semper XI. Calendarum Aprilium. Si autem VI. Calendarum Aprilium Dominus resurrexit, tertiusdecimus circuli præfati annus extitit, v. habens concurrentes, et lunam decimamquartam, ut semper nono Calendarum Aprilium. Porro si quinto Calendarum suprascriptarum resurrectio celebrata est Christi, secundus circuli decennovenalis existens annus concurrentes habebat quartam, e lunam decimamquartam: sicut semper octavo Calendarum Aprilium, quæ cunctæ decimæseptimæ lunæ, in qua die dominica prima sacrosanctæ resurrectionis sunt acta mysteria, cursu panduntur indubio . . .

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